

**Community Collaboration Work Group**  
**Meeting Minutes**

Wednesday, May 2, 2012; 7:30 a.m.  
Room 310 - County Administration Building

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** County Commissioner Jim Saalfeld (Chair); Grand Rapids City Commissioner Rosalynn Bliss (Vice-Chair); County Commissioner Dan Koorndyk; Grand Rapids City Commissioner Jim White; Attorney Jim Brown; Grand Rapids Township Supervisor Mike DeVries; Grand Valley State University Professor of Economics Paul Isely; President & CEO of the Hispanic Center of Western Michigan Maria Gonzalez-Cortes

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** President of the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce Rick Baker; County Commissioners Carol Hennessy & Mike Wawee Jr.; Walker City Manager Cathy Vander Meulen; President & CEO of The Right Place, Inc. Birgit Klohs

**ALSO PRESENT:** County Administrator/Controller Daryl Delabbio; Assistant County Administrators Wayman Britt & Mary Swanson; Executive Assistant to the Board Jamie Groom; County Corporate Counsel Dan Ophoff; County Commissioner Harold Mast; Grand Rapids City Manager Greg Sundstrom; Deputy Grand Rapids City Manager Eric DeLong; Sheriff Larry Stelma; Grand Rapids Police Chief Kevin Belk; Prosecutor Bill Forsyth; Grand Rapids City Attorney Catherine Mish; County Management Analyst Jen DeHaan; Scott Atchison

**NEWS MEDIA:** David Czurak, Grand Rapids Business Journal

Mr. Saalfeld called the meeting to order at 7:36 a.m.

I. **APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES**

The minutes from April 11, 2012, were reviewed and approved.

II. **SUMMARY OF MAJOR FUNCTIONS OF GOVERNMENT – PUBLIC SAFETY – PATROL, INVESTIGATIONS & CORRECTIONS - CONTINUED**

Sheriff Stelma restated that the Mutual Aid Agreement allows Kent County's local law enforcement the flexibility to combine services and do all of the collaborative projects that they do. He said that any next steps will take bold and innovative moves by the political community; in the past, major change has been driven by political leadership.

Chief Belk concurs with the Sheriff and reiterated how fortunate Kent County is to have a Sheriff and Chiefs that work so well together. He also agreed that to get beyond the collaborations that the Mutual Aid Agreement allows, the political bodies would need to drive the effort. He stated that the law enforcement community will continue to provide service no matter what service model is in place. When collaborating or consolidating services, the biggest hurdle is equity and dealing with the various levels of service in a community. The most equitable solution needs to be found, but ultimately this may involve giving up responsibility and giving up control.

Sheriff Stelma feels the barriers facing the Sheriff's Department involve service levels. When collaborating amongst municipalities, a single standard has to be met; for some it

is a reduction in service levels, and for some, it is an increase. For all, it represents a change, and that is sometimes difficult.

Mr. Saalfeld asked Sheriff Stelma and Chief Belk what would constitute a bold “next-step.”

Chief Belk said that a bold next-step would be consolidation, and while there are existing models where this has worked in other communities, he believes it would give minimal cost savings.

Sheriff Stelma added that there are a lot of good models and a lot of bad models. The bad models can be seen in organizations that go into consolidation with the wrong expectations, where one entity is doing it purely out of economic necessity, or with one entity just railroading it. Sheriff Stelma noted the problems that are now facing Louisville and a desire to unroll the consolidation. For consolidation to take place, it would take a great amount of political will.

#### Summary of Discussion

- The City of Grand Rapids, Kent County Sheriff and local municipalities do a lot of consolidation and collaboration already. A few examples include (i) 911 Dispatch (which was consolidated with Kent County), (ii) the Kent County Jail as a single point of intake for those arrested, and (iii) Emergency Management which is being consolidated with Kent County this year, (iv) township collaboration where three townships (Ada, Cascade and Grand Rapids Townships) and the Kent County Sheriff created the East Precinct, (v) joint chief meetings of all police departments, and (vi) emergency response back-up.
- Mutual Aid Agreements and Intergovernmental Agreements usually establish these efforts. There must be a strong level of trust and a sense that the relationship is equitable.
- Recommendation: continue promoting these efforts in areas where it makes sense, but also consider the next “big step” which may involve the consolidation of police units. Different models exist (some that have proven to be good and some bad) that can be studied for best practices/results. For example, the Louisville consolidated police force is now looking at ways to “unroll” the merged police force due to problems encountered post-merger. Possible barriers to consolidation include collective bargaining agreements with unions and significant legacy costs.
- Must consider the lessons learned from the bad models which often involved consolidation mandated by financial crisis.

### III. SUMMARY OF MAJOR FUNCTIONS OF GOVERNMENT – PROSECUTOR

Mr. Forsyth opened by saying that from his perspective as Prosecutor, Kent County is fortunate to have a high level of cooperation amongst its law enforcement community.

Mr. Forsyth explained that the Prosecutor has a lot of functions. The total budget is \$7.7 million. \$1.1 million originates from federal grant money passed through the Department of Human Services in Michigan. The Prosecutor's office works with all of the law enforcement agencies across the County and employs 19 employees: 4 attorneys and 15 support staff that work with the office of child support to set child support payments and establish paternity. Over the course of last year, Kent County had 3000 referrals and 1000 paternity cases. Kent County matches federal grant dollars with about \$600,000. While the Prosecutor's Office has handled paternity and child support issues for more than 30 years, Mr. Forsyth does not understand why.

The bulk of the Prosecutor's work involves the Criminal Division with 29 Assistant Prosecutors and 23-25 support people. The division is broken up into Juvenile, Appellate and Criminal. The Juvenile unit also works with DHS and deals a lot with abuse and termination of parental rights cases. There were 600 neglect/abuse cases last year and 300-400 parental termination cases last year. Also handled in the Prosecutor's office is the prosecution of juveniles under 17 (approximately 500 last year with follow-up prosecutions), mental incompetence hearings (approximately 700 last year), requests for personal protection orders (approximately 100 last year), and delinquency cases.

The Criminal Division handles about 9,000 warrants, 4,000 felonies, and 5,000 misdemeanors every year as well as thousands of traffic tickets. He made special note of how well the law enforcement community in Kent County works together in the investigation of crimes and handles overlapping jurisdictions well.

Overlapping jurisdiction happens most with misdemeanors. Every city of the County has a City Attorney's Office which enforces 90 day misdemeanors. Wyoming, Kentwood, Walker and Grandville have their own legal departments which handle these. There are also a lot of ordinances where there is no comparable state law. A variety of offenses could be prosecuted either way, but there are a lot of things that are city ordinance situations. It would be difficult for the County Prosecutor to enforce City ordinances. Collaboration is more difficult from this perspective.

The Prosecutor's office utilizes alternatives to prosecution. For example: contracting with an outside agency for non-sufficient funded checks and requiring offenders to go to a money management skills class and pay restitution, and a diversion program for first-time offenders of non-violent crime (100-150 people each year) which takes people out of the criminal program where they pay restitution, do community service, stay in school, etc. This program tries to match the program with the offender/offense.

Mr. Forsyth compared Kent County with Oakland County which is twice the size of Kent. Kent County has 33 Assistant Prosecutors, Oakland County has 95. Kent County's

Prosecutor's Office budget is \$7.7 million, and Oakland County's office has an \$18.5 million budget. Kent County has approximately 3,000 felony convictions each year, Oakland County has approximately 4,600. Oakland County has three-times as many prosecutors, a much larger budget, and less than twice the caseload. Some of this is a product of how Kent County's law enforcement community works together.

Mr. Forsyth reviewed the requirements and process for a preliminary exams and explained that the local courts have all agreed to allow the Prosecutor's Office to initially only subpoena the victim and the investigating detective to save on costs. At this time, the judge decides whether or not enough information has been presented to warrant the charges – or if other witnesses need to be subpoenaed. Kent County is the only county in the state to have this arrangement. This has saved a lot of money and inconvenience to citizens and has not imposed any kind of hardship on the defendant.

Mr. Forsyth feels that crime scene investigation is where the localities struggle the most. Juries expect that evidence and testing should be taken care of quickly, because that is what they see on television. However, it may take four months to get a DNA result from State Crime Lab. He commended the Grand Rapids Police Department and Sheriff's Department in their work collecting evidence. The Grand Rapids Police Department has a unit that works solely with collecting evidence, and the Sheriff's Department has just started doing this; other jurisdictions can't do this due to a lack of resources. A possible idea for collaboration would be to provide a county-wide evidence collection.

Due to lack of time, Mr. Saalfeld thanked the presenters and asked Mr. Forsyth and Ms. Mish to return on June 6 at 7:30 am to discuss areas where efficiencies/better government can be promoted through collaboration.

#### IV. OPEN BUSINESS/OTHER ITEMS

Mr. Saalfeld suggested extending these meetings by one half hour. Others felt this was reasonable, but it was also suggested that the Work Group meet for a four hour time span occasionally to get a larger chunk of work done; this would allow for time to reflect on what was shared immediately following the work-time.

The decision was to add a half hour to each meeting, beginning with the next meeting. Towards the end of the summer/early fall, the Work Group may want to look at a long session, gauging by where it is in its work.

It was suggested that for the next meeting, the work end with the Prosecutor's office so that there will be time to collect thoughts and review what has been learned from the presentations by Law Enforcement and the Prosecutor's Office.

#### V. PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

VI. NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, June 6, 2012; 7:30 a.m.–9:00 a.m.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Saalfeld adjourned the meeting at 8:39 a.m.